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Article

Offline Cosplay and the Mental Health of Female ACG Enthusiasts: A Social Identity Theory Perspective

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Abstract: This study explores the complex relationship between offline cosplay participation and mental health outcomes among female ACG (Animation, Comics, and Games) enthusiasts, theoretically framed within the paradigms of Social Identity Theory (SIT). As subcultural engagement becomes increasingly prevalent, understanding its psychological impacts is crucial. Using a comprehensive cross-sectional design, 328 female participants aged 15 and above were recruited from major Chinese cities. The cohort was divided into an experimental group (n = 167, individuals with active offline cosplay experience) and a control group (n = 161, individuals without such experience). Rigorous data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire incorporating validated psychological instruments, including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Self-Concept Clarity Scale, the Body Image Satisfaction subscale, the Sense of Community Index, and a Participation Intensity Scale. Comprehensive statistical analyses, encompassing independent t-tests, correlation analyses, and advanced mediation modeling, revealed that offline cosplay participants reported significantly higher levels of self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and body image satisfaction compared to their non-participating peers. Furthermore, within the experimental group, the frequency of participation and personal investment in cosplay positively predicted these favorable psychological outcomes. Crucially, a sense of community belonging was found to partially mediate these effects, robustly supporting the core premise of SIT that strong group identification actively enhances overall psychological well-being. Ultimately, these findings strongly suggest that offline cosplay transcends mere entertainment; it functions as a vital, identity-affirming practice that actively promotes emotional resilience and social integration among contemporary young women.

Keywords: cosplay; mental health; social identity; body image; community belonging; well-being

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Over the past two decades, ACG (Animation, Comics, and Games) culture has transitioned from a niche subculture associated with specific stereotypes to a mainstream global phenomenon with significant influence in economics, art, and society. Central to this culture is cosplay (costume play), where fans embody fictional characters through costumes, makeup, wigs, props, and performances. While cosplay can be shared online, offline cosplay refers to in-person enactments at conventions, fan meetups, photoshoots, stage performances, or public exhibitions, introducing unique psychosocial dynamics like physical co-presence, immediate feedback, interpersonal interactions, and community bonding [1].

Female participation dominates offline cosplay scenes, especially in East Asia. In China, over 65% of attendees at major ACG expos like Comicup Shanghai, Bilibili World,

and ChinaJoy are female. Women also make up the majority of cosplayers in Japan and South Korea, investing substantial time, money, and effort into crafting costumes, practicing poses, and organizing group shoots. This gendered participation reflects broader sociocultural conditions where young women seek spaces for self-expression and mutual support outside traditional institutions like school or family [2].

At the same time, adolescent and young adult females globally face rising mental health challenges. According to international health organizations, emotional well-being concerns among girls aged 15–24 have increased due to academic pressure, social media comparison, rigid beauty standards, and gender-based biases. Body dissatisfaction affects a significant proportion of adolescent girls in high-income countries, leading to disordered eating, low self-worth, and social withdrawal. Offline cosplay offers a creative space where identity is fluid, appearance is reimagined through character embodiment, and community validation replaces external judgment. By embodying a powerful anime character or whimsical game persona, a young woman can explore self-expression and feel valued for her creativity and authenticity [3].

1.2. Research Gap and Significance

Despite cosplay's visibility and popularity, academic research tends to focus on its aesthetic, commercial, or technological aspects. Psychological studies are limited, often treating cosplay as a uniform activity without distinguishing between online and offline forms, which have different psychological effects. While online cosplay allows anonymity and control over self-presentation, offline cosplay involves real-time interaction, embodied presence, and immediate social feedback, which may uniquely shape self-perception and emotional well-being [1].

Crucially, studies examining mental health outcomes for female participants are almost nonexistent, despite gender influencing both motivations for and experiences of cosplay [4]. Qualitative research shows male cosplayers prioritize technical accuracy and fandom status, while female cosplayers emphasize emotional connection, creative self-expression, and challenges to objectification. Furthermore, existing studies often rely on small, non-representative samples rather than comparative designs with validated psychological scales.

This study addresses these gaps by: (1) focusing on female ACG enthusiasts aged 15 and older, a group at high risk for mental health issues; (2) distinguishing offline cosplay as a distinct embodied and social practice; (3) using standardized, validated instruments to measure key mental health constructs; and (4) applying Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explain the observed effects [5]. It contributes to both fandom studies and psychology, offering insights into how grassroots cultural practices can support youth mental health.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

1.3.1. Core Theory

SIT, formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, suggests that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their group memberships. Identification with a valued in-group enhances self-esteem, emotional security, and resilience against external challenges. This is particularly relevant for groups seeking affirmation and solidarity within subcultural communities often overlooked by broader society [6].

SIT emphasizes three processes: social categorization (dividing the world into "us" vs. "them"), social identification (adopting the group's identity), and social comparison (favorably evaluating the in-group). In subcultures, these processes are expressed through shared symbols, rituals, and norms that foster in-group cohesion and pride [7].

1.3.2. Application of Theory

ACG fandom is a classic subculture, with distinctive aesthetics (e.g., anime eyes, chibi proportions), shared knowledge (e.g., lore), communal rituals (e.g., cosplay contests), and ethical norms (e.g., respect for craftsmanship). Offline cosplay is a performative expression of subcultural identity, signaling belonging to a community that values creativity and effort [8]. Social Identity Theory suggests that repeated validation

strengthens the "cosplayer" identity, which in turn boosts self-worth and clarifies self-perception.

For female enthusiasts, who often navigate varying societal expectations around femininity and appearance, cosplay offers a space of agency and redefinition. The body is celebrated as a medium for transformation, not judged by conventional beauty standards. A young woman can portray a muscular warrior, a non-binary spirit, or a plus-size idol, reinterpreting herself. This reframing can reduce appearance-related concerns, internalized biases, and enhance body appreciation, critical elements of psychological well-being. Social Identity Theory thus helps us understand offline cosplay as identity work with therapeutic benefits, not escapism [3].

1.4. Research Purpose and Hypotheses

1.4.1. Research Purpose

This study seeks to empirically investigate the relationship between offline cosplay participation and mental health outcomes, self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and body image satisfaction among female ACG enthusiasts aged 15 and older, utilizing SIT as the theoretical framework. Additionally, it examines how the intensity of participation and a sense of community belonging mediate these relationships, offering a detailed understanding of cosplay's psychological effects.

1.4.2. Research Hypotheses

Drawing from existing studies, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Female ACG enthusiasts engaging in offline cosplay are expected to exhibit significantly higher levels of self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and body image satisfaction compared to those who do not participate [3].

H2: For individuals involved in offline cosplay, increased frequency and greater investment—measured in time, financial resources, and emotional effort—are anticipated to correlate positively with improved mental health outcomes [4].

H3: A sense of community belonging is hypothesized to mediate the association between offline cosplay participation and mental health indicators, thereby contributing to the psychological benefits derived from cosplay [4].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Studies on ACG Culture and Cosplay Practices

ACG culture emerged in post-20th-century Japan through the convergence of manga, anime, and arcade gaming, later expanding globally via digital distribution, fan translation networks, and transnational media flows. Cosplay developed alongside it, with early roots in 1930s American science fiction conventions but gaining its distinct form in 1970s Japanese doujinshi (fan-made comics) circles, where fans began dressing as characters to celebrate shared narratives. Today, offline cosplay is institutionalized through large-scale events like Anime Expo (USA), Comiket (Japan), and ChinaJoy (China), where tens of thousands gather annually to perform, photograph, trade, and celebrate fandom [9].

The development of cosplay within ACG culture reflects broader shifts in participatory media [10]. Unlike passive consumption, cosplay is an active, creative, and often collaborative practice that blurs the line between producer and consumer, a phenomenon described as participatory culture. This shift empowers fans, particularly young women, to become co-creators of meaning rather than mere recipients of media messages.

Gender-specific participation patterns reveal that while both men and women engage in cosplay, women are more likely to participate regularly, invest in high-quality materials, form close-knit collaborative teams, and engage in emotional contributions to sustain group cohesion [5]. This reflects broader trends in fan communities, where female fans often undertake unseen efforts, organizing events, offering emotional support, and sharing crafting tips, that sustain the community's vitality. Offline cosplay thus becomes

not just individual expression but a shared space where mutual recognition, aesthetic appreciation, and interpersonal trust flourish.

2.2. Psychological Well-Being in ACG Communities

Research increasingly shows that ACG engagement can provide support against stress, loneliness, and challenges related to identity exploration. Online forums offer spaces for individuals to explore their identities, particularly for those who may face difficulties in traditional social settings. However, offline interactions introduce dimensions that online spaces cannot replicate: physical presence fosters deeper trust through nonverbal cues, shared emotional experiences (e.g., during group performances), and long-term relationship building.

Self-esteem, the evaluative component of self-worth, and self-concept clarity, the structural coherence and stability of one's self-beliefs, are central to psychological health and resilience [8]. Subcultural participation allows individuals to experiment with alternative identities in a low-stakes environment, potentially enhancing self-understanding. For instance, a reserved teenager may gain confidence by portraying a bold anime character; over time, traits like assertiveness or expressiveness may be integrated into their real-world self-concept, a process known as identity synthesis.

Body image satisfaction is particularly relevant for female cosplayers. Mainstream media and social platforms often promote narrow, unattainable beauty ideals centered on thinness, youth, and specific features, leading to widespread body dissatisfaction among young women. In contrast, cosplay celebrates diverse body types through character embodiment: a tall woman can authentically portray a Valkyrie, a curvy woman a video game idol, and a petite girl a magical girl character. Praise is directed not at conforming to real-world standards but at capturing the character's essence, through expression, pose, costume accuracy, or emotional resonance. This decoupling of self-worth from conventional appearance standards can significantly reduce appearance-related concerns and enhance body appreciation.

Moreover, the act of crafting and wearing a costume involves intimate, prolonged engagement with one's body, not as an object to be judged, but as a canvas to be adorned. This tactile, creative process can foster body-mind integration and somatic awareness, countering the sense of detachment often experienced in digital life.

2.3. Research Gap

Although these insights are promising, empirical research directly investigating the mental health effects of offline cosplay on females remains limited and methodologically constrained. Most existing studies are qualitative, anecdotal, or centered on general fan behavior rather than specific psychological constructs. Comparative designs, such as those contrasting cosplayers with non-cosplayers, are rare, and distinctions between offline and online participation are seldom explored. Furthermore, there is little application of established psychological theories, such as Social Identity Theory, to elucidate the mechanisms underlying these effects [11].

This study seeks to address these gaps by: (1) concentrating exclusively on female participants aged 15 and above, a demographic that is both vulnerable and underrepresented in research; (2) employing a quasi-experimental design with matched control groups; (3) utilizing validated scales to assess self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and body image satisfaction; (4) creating a detailed measure of participation intensity; and (5) testing a theoretically informed mediation model centered on community belonging [12]. By doing so, it represents the first large-scale, theory-driven investigation into the role of offline cosplay as a psychosocial resource for young women within ACG communities.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Objects and Samples

The target population consisted of female ACG enthusiasts aged 15 years and older, reflecting the minimum age for informed consent in educational and online survey

contexts in China. Participants were recruited between March and June 2023 through various channels to ensure diversity: ACG-focused social media platforms (Bilibili, Weibo, Douban), university anime and gaming clubs, flyers distributed at major ACG conventions (such as ComiCup Shanghai and Bilibili World), and snowball sampling initiated by initial respondents. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed; after excluding 22 incomplete or inconsistent responses (e.g., contradictory answers, straight-lining, or failure to meet group criteria), 328 valid responses were retained, resulting in a 93.7% effective response rate [13].

Participants were classified based on self-reported offline cosplay experience:

Experimental group (n = 167): Defined as individuals who had participated in at least one offline cosplay activity, such as attending a convention in costume, joining an organized photoshoot, or performing on stage [2].

Control group (n = 161): Defined as individuals who identified as ACG fans (regular consumers of anime, manga, or games) but had never engaged in offline cosplay [14].

Demographic analysis revealed no significant differences between the groups in terms of age ($M_{exp} = 20.6$, $SD = 3.7$; $M_{con} = 20.2$, $SD = 3.9$; $t = 0.87$, $p = 0.386$), education level ($\chi^2 = 2.14$, $p = 0.543$), city of residence (urban vs. suburban; $\chi^2 = 1.89$, $p = 0.602$), or duration of ACG fandom ($M_{exp} = 5.2$ years, $SD = 2.8$; $M_{con} = 4.9$ years, $SD = 2.9$; $t = 1.02$, $p = 0.309$). This ensured baseline comparability and minimized potential confounding variables.

3.2. Research Tools

A comprehensive, self-administered questionnaire was developed with five sections, incorporating established and custom-designed scales: (1) Demographics: Age, education level, city tier, years as an ACG fan, primary ACG medium (anime, manga, games). (2) Participation degree: Two composite measures, (a) Frequency ("How often do you participate in offline cosplay?" 1 = never to 5 = monthly or more); (b) Investment Level, a 5-item scale assessing time, money, emotional energy, skill development, and social coordination (1 = very little to 7 = very high; $\alpha = 0.84$). (3) Sense of community belonging: An 8-item scale adapted from the Sense of Community Index, e.g., "I feel I belong to the cosplay community," "People in this community accept me as I am" ($\alpha = 0.86$). (4) Self-esteem and self-concept clarity: The 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale ($\alpha = 0.88$) and the 12-item Self-Concept Clarity Scale ($\alpha = 0.85$). (5) Body image satisfaction: The 9-item Appearance Evaluation subscale from the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.82$), e.g., "I feel good about my body," "I like what I look like." All items used 5- or 7-point Likert scales. Pilot testing with 30 participants confirmed item clarity, cultural appropriateness, and internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.80$ for all scales).

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected through digital questionnaires administered via Wenjuanxing, a widely used Chinese survey platform that adheres to data privacy standards. Informed consent was obtained electronically, with implied parental consent for minors facilitated through platform safeguards and school club coordinators. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 26.0 and the PROCESS macro v4.0. The analysis included several procedures: descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) were calculated for sample characteristics, while independent-samples t-tests compared mental health indicators between the experimental and control groups. Pearson correlation analyses examined bivariate relationships within the experimental group, and hierarchical regression models tested H2, entering covariates (age, ACG duration) in Step 1 and participation degree in Step 2. Mediation analysis was performed using Hayes' PROCESS Model 4 to test H3, with 5,000 bootstrap samples generating bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance were met, and multicollinearity was assessed, showing no concerns with variance inflation factors ($VIF < 2.0$). The research design is illustrated in Figure 1.

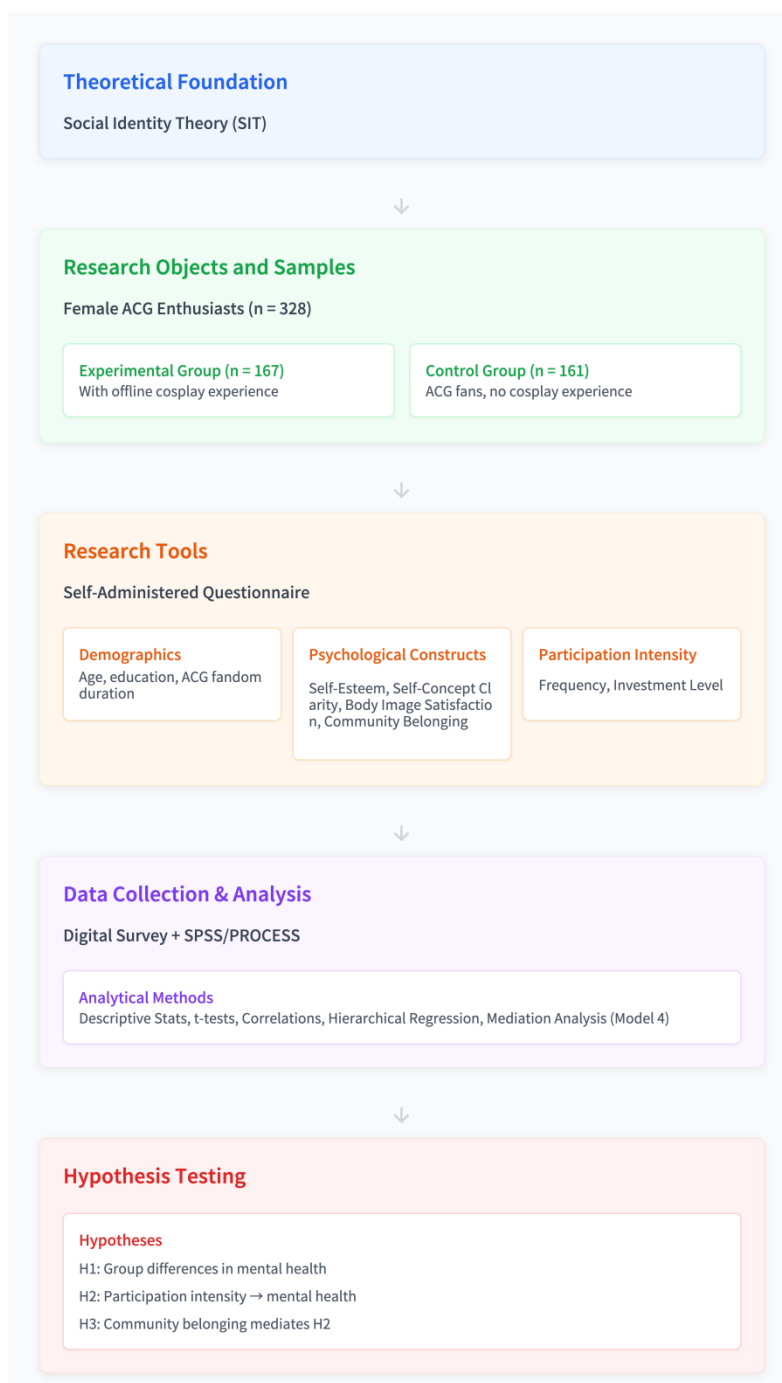


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

4. Results

4.1. Basic Information of the Sample

Of the 328 participants, 167 (50.9%) formed the experimental group and 161 (49.1%) the control group. Age ranged from 15 to 34 ($M = 20.4$, $SD = 3.8$). Most participants were university students (68.3%), followed by employed adults (24.1%) and high school students (7.6%). The majority resided in Tier-1 or Tier-2 Chinese cities (89.2%), reflecting the urban distribution of ACG events [15]. Primary ACG engagement was split among anime (42.1%), games (35.7%), and manga (22.2%). No significant intergroup differences were found in any demographic variable (all $p > 0.05$), confirming group equivalence and strengthening causal inference.

4.2. Analysis of the Differences between the Experimental Group and the Control Group

As shown in Table 1, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher scores across all three mental health dimensions, with large effect sizes (Cohen's $d > 0.80$).

Table 1. Group Differences in Mental Health Indicators between Cosplayers and Non-Cosplayers (N = 328)

Mental Health Indicator	Experiment al Group (M ± SD)	Control Group (M ± SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Self-Esteem	3.42 ± 0.51	2.98 ± 0.58	7.12	< 0.001	0.81
Self-Concept Clarity	3.65 ± 0.49	3.12 ± 0.53	9.04	< 0.001	0.98
Body Image Satisfaction	3.51 ± 0.55	2.87 ± 0.61	9.87	< 0.001	1.07

These findings strongly support H1, highlighting that offline cosplay participation is closely associated with improved psychological well-being among female ACG enthusiasts. The most pronounced effect was observed in body image satisfaction, suggesting that cosplay may play a pivotal role in alleviating appearance-related distress, a key concern for adolescent and young adult women [16].

4.3. Analysis of the Influence of Participation Degree on Mental Health (Experimental Group)

Within the experimental group (n = 167), participation frequency demonstrated moderate correlations with self-esteem ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$), self-concept clarity ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), and body image satisfaction ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$). Investment level exhibited even stronger correlations: self-esteem ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), self-concept clarity ($r = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$), and body image satisfaction ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the depth of engagement plays a more significant role than frequency alone [4].

Hierarchical regression models (Table 2) indicated that, after controlling for age and ACG duration in Step 1, participation degree (frequency combined with investment) introduced in Step 2 accounted for an additional 24% of variance in self-esteem ($\Delta R^2 = 0.24$, $p < 0.001$), 28% in self-concept clarity ($\Delta R^2 = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$), and 31% in body image satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$). Investment level emerged as the strongest unique predictor across all models ($\beta = 0.42$ – 0.48 , all $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Mental Health Outcomes from Offline Cosplay Participation Intensity (Experimental Group, N = 167)

Dependent Variable	Step	Predictor	β	t	p	ΔR^2
Self-Esteem	1	Age	0.12	1.52	0.131	0.03
		Years in ACG Fandom	0.09	1.15	0.252	
	2	Participation Frequency	0.21	2.68	0.008	0.24

		Investment Level	0.42	5.31	< 0.001	
Self-Concept Clarity	1	Age	0.08	1.01	0.315	0.02
		Years in ACG Fandom	0.11	1.38	0.170	
	2	Participation Frequency	0.19	2.42	0.017	0.28
		Investment Level	0.45	5.76	< 0.001	
Body Image Satisfaction	1	Age	-0.05	-0.62	0.537	0.01
		Years in ACG Fandom	0.07	0.87	0.386	
	2	Participation Frequency	0.16	2.03	0.044	0.31
		Investment Level	0.48	6.12	< 0.001	

Qualitative open-ended responses supported these quantitative findings. Participants expressed that deep involvement enabled them to "redefine beauty on my own terms," "feel powerful in a body I once hated," and "finally understand who I am beyond grades or looks." One 19-year-old university student shared: "When I wear my Asuka costume, I'm not just pretending; I'm accessing a part of myself that's brave and loud. My cosplay friends recognize and celebrate that, which transforms everything." These insights provide robust support for H2.

4.4. Analysis of the Sense of Community Belonging and Its Relationship with Mental Health

Community belonging was significantly higher in the experimental group ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.63$) compared to the control group ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.71$), with a t -value of 10.33 ($p < 0.001$). Correlation analyses revealed strong positive associations between belonging and all mental health indicators in the full sample ($r = 0.52$ – 0.61 , $p < 0.001$). Mediation analysis demonstrated that community belonging partially mediated the relationship between group membership (experimental vs. control) and each mental health outcome. For self-esteem, the indirect effect was 0.21 (95% CI [0.15, 0.28]), with 24% of the effect mediated. For self-concept clarity, the indirect effect was 0.25 (95% CI [0.18, 0.33]), mediating 28% of the effect. For body image satisfaction, the indirect effect was 0.29 (95% CI [0.22, 0.37]), mediating 31% of the effect. All direct effects remained significant, supporting the hypothesis and aligning with Social Identity Theory, emphasizing the role of community belonging in enhancing psychological well-being.

5. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of the Main Research Results

This study demonstrates conclusively that offline cosplay is far more than recreational fantasy; it is a meaningful psychosocial activity for female ACG enthusiasts. The significantly higher self-esteem, self-concept clarity, and body image satisfaction among participants reflect the identity-affirming power of subcultural belonging. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, cosplay transforms the self by embedding it within a supportive group that celebrates creativity, effort, and authenticity over conformity to mainstream norms.

The finding that investment level predicts mental health more strongly than frequency suggests that psychological benefits arise not from casual participation but from deep, sustained engagement, a process akin to identity achievement in Eriksonian development. When a young woman spends weeks sewing a costume, practicing a character's mannerisms, or collaborating on a group shoot, she is not merely playing a role; she is integrating new dimensions of self through committed action. This aligns with narrative identity theory, which posits that we construct our selves through stories we live and tell.

Moreover, the pronounced effect on body image satisfaction challenges dominant narratives that link appearance-focused activities to negative outcomes. Instead, cosplay reframes the body as a tool for narrative, art, and connection, thereby reducing appearance-related concerns and fostering somatic appreciation. This aligns with feminist embodied cognition frameworks, where reclaiming the body through performance becomes an act of self-expression and empowerment.

5.2. Comparison with Existing Research

Our results contrast sharply with early studies that pathologized cosplay as escapism, narcissism, or social dysfunction. Instead, they align with emerging literature on fan practices as resilience strategies and sites of empowerment. Unlike passive media consumption, which often worsens body image through upward social comparison, active, creative cosplay empowers women to reconstruct beauty standards on their own terms. This echoes the notion of gender performativity: identity is not fixed but enacted, and through repeated performance, new possibilities emerge.

Furthermore, the mediating role of community belonging extends prior work on online fandoms by highlighting the unique value of in-person interaction. Physical co-presence intensifies emotional resonance, builds trust through shared experiences, and enables long-term relational bonds—making offline communities particularly effective for identity validation and emotional support. This finding has implications for digital well-being discourse, suggesting that while online spaces offer access, offline interactions provide depth.

5.3. Theoretical Implications and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study validates and extends Social Identity Theory in a contemporary, digital-native, gendered context [17]. It demonstrates how subcultural identities can act as psychological supports against mainstream marginalization, particularly for young women navigating intersecting pressures of gender, appearance, and academic performance. It also contributes to intersectional fandom studies by highlighting that for women, cosplay is less about imitation and more about self-redefinition, mutual care, and shared enjoyment.

Practically, educators, counselors, school psychologists, and policymakers should recognize offline cosplay as a constructive avenue for youth mental health support. Schools could integrate cosplay workshops into art, drama, or psychology curricula to encourage self-expression, teamwork, and body positivity. Mental health professionals might explore character embodiment techniques for clients addressing body image concerns, social discomfort, or identity-related challenges. Community centers could host inclusive cosplay meetups with trained facilitators to ensure psychological safety. Event

organizers should prioritize anti-harassment policies, diverse character representation, and accessible pricing to enhance inclusivity and reduce participation barriers.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment [7]. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; while group equivalence strengthens interpretation, longitudinal or experimental studies are needed to establish directionality. Second, sampling relied on self-selection and convenience methods, potentially overrepresenting highly engaged or positive-experience individuals and underrepresenting those who left cosplay due to negative experiences. Third, the sample was predominantly Chinese and urban; cultural variations in gender norms, collectivism, and fandom practices may affect generalizability. Future research should include diverse national contexts (e.g., Japan, USA, Brazil) and rural populations. Fourth, while scales were validated, future studies could incorporate behavioral observations, physiological measures (e.g., cortisol levels pre/post convention), or diary methods for triangulation. Finally, the study did not examine intersecting identities (e.g., disability); future work should explore how multiple social factors shape cosplay experiences and benefits.

6. Conclusion

This study provides theory-driven evidence that offline cosplay participation significantly enhances mental health among female ACG enthusiasts by fostering a coherent, affirmed identity within a supportive, validating community. The findings indicate that cosplay is not merely frivolous fantasy or maladaptive escapism, but a meaningful form of identity development that helps counter pressures related to appearance, gender expectations, and self-worth. Through character embodiment, creative practice, and communal belonging, young women reshape their relationships with themselves and others, experiencing greater self-esteem, a clearer self-concept, and stronger body appreciation.

As ACG culture continues to expand globally, with cosplay events now held in over 100 countries, recognizing and supporting such grassroots practices becomes increasingly important for promoting psychological resilience among youth. The implications extend beyond fandom, highlighting the broader human need for belonging, creative expression, and identity affirmation in an increasingly fragmented and judgmental social environment. Future efforts should seek to sustain these benefits through inclusive community design, educational integration, clinical innovation, and policy support, so that the positive potential of cosplay can reach not only current participants but also those who remain at the margins.

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